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CROW INDIAN PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT
OPEN AT UM

MISSOULA--

Fred E. Miller's turn-of-the-century photographs of Crow Indians, a collection of which are on display at the University of Montana, are remarkable more for their honesty than their drama.

The exhibit, "Fred E. Miller: Photographer of the Crows," runs Sept. 25 through Nov. 1 in the Gallery of Visual Arts, located in the Social Sciences Building.

Shunning the artifice employed by many of his contemporaries, Miller photographed the Crows of Montana exactly as he found them: in their customary clothing, in the middle of their daily routine, in their own environment.

His straightforward, snapshot-like photos documented the Crows' transition from a nomadic existence on the plains to a sedentary life on the reservation.

By contrast, the renowned photographer Edward S. Curtis recreated American Indian history rather than documenting it in the making. He clothed his subjects in costumes of a bygone era, used special effects to create drama, and removed from his photos any trace of the white man's civilization.

(over)

crows--add one

Other differences are apparent between Miller's photos and those of his fellow "shadow catchers," as the Crows called the early photographers.

Miller avoided the traditional tightly composed studio shot. His photos are generally broader in scope, showing the Crows against the backdrop of a river, a tepee, a harsh plain or the ever-present Big Sky.

In addition, the intimacy of some of Miller's photos -- such as the one of a Crow tweezing his whiskers in the privacy of his tepee -- attests to the unique relationship between Miller and his American Indian subjects.

Miller did not simply photograph the Crows; he lived among them and spoke their language.

"Of all the photographers of the American Indian, Fred Miller is the only one who actually lived among his subjects and knew them intimately as friends and neighbors -- as people," writes William Stapp, curator of photographs at the Smithsonian National Institution National Portrait Gallery.

Although he came to Crow Agency as a government clerk, Miller was "adopted" by the Crows, in the words of his granddaughter Nancy Fields O'Connor. O'Connor, a former Missoulian and a 1951 UM graduate, is the producer of the exhibit.

She also is the wife of actor Carroll O'Connor, who earned a master's in speech at UM in 1956 and immortalized the role of television's Archie Bunker.

Nancy Fields O'Connor's task of recovering the glass plate negatives for Miller's photos was not a simple one. When Miller died in Hardin in 1936

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crows--add two

at age 68, 500 of his negatives sold for a small sum at a court-ordered public auction.

In 1980, she acquired 140 of the plates, which were all that remained. One hundred two photographs from these plates are in the exhibit.

The exhibit is presented by the School of Fine Arts and UGO Productions, Inc., of Los Angeles with financial assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities and UGO.

As part of UM's homecoming celebration, there will be an opening reception for the exhibit from 3-5 p.m. Oct. 6 in the Gallery of Visual Arts.

Another reception honoring the exhibit will run from 3-5 p.m. Oct. 11 in the Gallery of Visual Arts. Included will be a presentation in honor of Hulda Fields, a 1927 UM graduate and the daughter of Fred Miller. The reception is sponsored by the UM Foundation and the Alumni Association. All alumni and friends of the Fields family are welcome.

Gallery hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. For more information, call the gallery at 243-2813.

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